TheVillage

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Issue #232 March 2023

NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

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TheVillage Issue 232 March 2023

inside

Bringing you village life for almost 25 years

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Front cover: The Green Man leads the Alvechurch Wassail procession, taken by Mark Easter. Follow Mark on Instagram @markthroughalens

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GREEN BELT 'THE PRIORITY'

A SCHEME to build 15 affordable homes and three bungalows down a village lane has been vetoed by a government planning inspector.

In doing so, the inspector confirmed that policies protecting the Green Belt take precedence over the availability of a five-year supply of housing land in the area.

The plans for Ash Lane, Hopwood, had already been rejected by Bromsgrove District Council a year ago as being inappropriate and harmful to the Green Belt.

The would-be developers appealed to the national Planning Inspectorate and a hearing was held in Redditch last autumn.

The inspector announced the decision to dismiss the appeal last month, concluding that the plan "constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and that it would have a significant degree of impact on both its spatial and visual openness."

The inspector noted that a lack of a five-year housing supply in Bromsgrove district as of April 2022 could mean that planning permission should be granted "unless one of two circumstances apply".

The first of these, contained in the national planning guidance "Framework", says: "The application of policies . . . that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed".

The inspector concluded: "As such, a proposal that does not accord with Green Belt policies in the Framework provides a clear reason for refusal."

Local councillors hope that the potential "loophole" around housing land supply will in any case be closed by an anticipated reduction in the number of houses needed within Bromsgrove district.

As reported in *The Village* last autumn, a government recalculation will reduce the number of homes needed to be built in Bromsgrove district by the year 2040 by around 2,250 and this should eventually be reflected in the five-year land supply developers have been keen to try to exploit in recent applications.

Pedestrian access 'when not if'

A WRANGLE over public access to open space at a village housing estate could soon be resolved after Bromsgrove District Council issued a planning notice.

The dispute over the gates (pictured above, right) at Foxhills, Barnt Green, has been going on since the estate was built by CALA Homes more than four years ago.

Almost half of the designated public open space provided as part of the development lies behind the gates, according to calculations by district councillor Charlie Hotham.

Bromsgrove planners have now issued a Breach of Condition Notice (BCN) to the management company that took on the running of the shared parts of the estate after it was completed.

The notice says a planning condition "has not been complied due to the failure to install the pedestrian gate to plots 39-48" and tells Foxhills (Barnt Green) Management Company Ltd to install the gate. The company has 30 days to comply with the notice, with an anticipated deadline of March 8.

The notice warns there is no appeal to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government against the notice and the only way to contest it is by an application to the High Court for a judicial review.

Councillor Hotham told *The Village*: "I am pleased that the BCN has finally been served. A BCN is a powerful tool which, if not complied with, can lead to prosecution in the magistrates court.

"I believe it is now a question of when the gate will be open to the public rather than if."

As well as the public open space, a pedestrian gate would also give access to through to Cherry Hill Road, although there is another locked gate at that end.

Lifts arriving this autumn

NETWORK RAIL has confirmed that the long-awaited installation of lifts at Barnt Green rail station will go ahead this year.

A spokeswoman said: "We are aiming for an autumn start on site."

A new, higher footbridge was built at the station in 2015 to accommodate cables as part of the electrification of the line to Bromsgrove, but the lifts to enable those who can't tackle the steps were omitted.

Robert Cholmondeley, chairman of Barnt Green Parish Council, told *The Village*: "This is a significant and positive development in a long campaign by the parish council.

"We have actively and persistently lobbied through Network Rail and politicians for disabled access at the station after a new footbridge was installed in 2015.

"We have seen the case gain approval within Network Rail, then at the Department for Transport and finally at ministerial level. It's been a long process, but it's fantastic news Network Rail has the approval."

‘Back us’ plea by top horse race stables

THE HEAD of a leading horse racing stables based near Portway has appealed for recognition and support from Bromsgrove District Council.

Ian Williams, who has run Dominion Racing Stables for the past 25 years, producing winners at every British racecourse, was seeking support from Beoley Parish Council for a resubmitted planning application to build an access road at the stables.

The parish council had opposed the original application, which was subsequently turned down by district council planners.

Beoley parish chairman Trevor Bland said the road would be “a scar” across open fields, but Mr Williams said it was needed as transport costs bringing in supplies for more than 100 horses were “going through the roof”.

Dominion was “world renowned and something that Bromsgrove should be proud of,” said Mr Williams. “I can’t get over to you how much we bring in to this area. The district council should be hailing its success.”

Coun Bland said: “I get the impression the local planning authority are simply making a mark in the sand and saying, enough is enough, we don’t want scars across the countryside.

“When the application goes in again, we will look at it again; certainly, no one has got it in for Dominion,” added Coun Bland.

A VILLAGE’S annual Snowdrop Festival blossomed this year, with a constant stream of visitors during the weekend event.

Many of those who visited St Leonard’s Church, Beoley, had been married there over the years and took part in a marriage blessing on the Saturday.

Eighty couples sent in their picture to be on display during the festival, which also featured wedding dresses through the years.

The demand for a St Leonard’s snowdrop was so high, the team had to dig up more to be sold on the Sunday.

Among those helping to make the event a success were members of Beoley Mothers’ Union (above) and the Rev Gail Rogers (below), vicar of Beoley, with some of the church’s snowdrop crop.

£7,000 turn-off

A DECISION on expanding Alvechurch’s footway lighting project has been deferred because of the cost.

The parish council heard that to light a stretch of Swan’s Length, which does not currently have any street lamps, would cost £658 for the two columns – but £7,099 to connect them as there was currently no electricity supply. Acting chairman Coun Steve Hornsby said: “It does seem an awful lot of money to illuminate 20 metres of Swan’s Length.” Councillors decided to wait until the current project was completed before making a decision.

‘River’ runs dry

THE “BROWN River of Bordesley” is no more, Coun Steve Hornsby told Alvechurch parish councillors.

“It was discovered that the drain had collapsed and water was backing up and then mixing with the run-off from the fields, making the Brown River and then running back down the road,” he explained.

“They have now installed a new drain . . . but they could have installed a log flume if they’d had a mind to!”

Growing plans

SOME VILLAGERS across Alvechurch have been surveyed over a grass verges project, which will promote biodiversity in the village. They will be in unobtrusive locations and left to grow naturally, district councillor Annette English told parish councillors.

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Community in action

The Alvechurch Community Larder committee explains how villagers got behind the plan.

Above: Alvechurch Morris Men hand over a cheque for £214, proceeds from their New Year's Day performances, to Dave Shoesmith, Alvechurch Larder treasurer.

What is community? Perhaps it is when people see a need and have a desire to respond. The Alvechurch Community Larder started from the Churches Together Lent course, but soon included a wider group of people. We recognised that the best help and support would come from inside our own community.

There are many different models of larder-type organisation trying to reduce food waste and benefit the less well-off in their communities. Every one of this type of organisation has flourished in the present economic climate.

We are not in competition with food banks, just something different. There is no requirement for a referral, and all are welcome. From the vision last March to the opening date in December was a challenge for the committee, but we succeeded.

Numbers of clients have risen and now average 38 people. Damaged packages, excess stock and near sell-buy date items, all of which may have been bound for landfill, comprise the bulk of our goods.

We have also received food donations from the local community, so there is a changing variety on offer. However, there is more to the Larder than meets the eye. In addition to the receptionist to greet people and a personal shopper to help choose the goods on offer, there is also someone specifically to talk to clients, should they wish.

A chat over a cup of tea and some social contact may be what someone needs to brighten their day or week.

The magic of Alvechurch is that there are people who really care. The committee is an action group not a talk shop. The Larder is a team effort. The wonderful volunteers are the backbone of the Larder and work tirelessly to make the project a success.

We have been supported by generous individuals and companies both financially and with expertise. Our parish council has been of great support and we are particularly grateful to Alvechurch Baptist Church, who have given us a home.

What of the future? We must forge links with younger people, who are very aware of both need and environmental issues. We have links with our local schools which we hope to strengthen with the launch of the Larder website. We want to show how and what we do and ask younger people to join in our success.

The seed of an idea has germinated but who knows how big it could grow? This is Alvechurch in action.

■ Anyone is welcome between 11am-12.30pm at Alvechurch Baptist Church on Fridays. A £4 payment buys items worth around £20.
If you have items to donate, you can do this between 10am-12pm at the Baptist Church.

Windscreen sticker warning for poor parkers

INCONSIDERATE motorists who park in disabled bays outside a village shopping precinct may find a notice stuck to their windscreen when they return.

Alvechurch Parish Council have been pressing the county council for improvements to keep the bays in The Square free for Blue Badge holders, but in the absence of progress have decided to see if their own council officers can help. The plan is for a parish council sticker explaining to the errant parker that they are in a bay intended for disabled motorists to be placed on the windscreen where it needs to be removed before driving away.

Acting chairman Steve Hornsby told the parish council's monthly meeting: "I am happy to give authority for this if at the first sign of trouble you beat a hasty retreat."

WASSAIL, DRINK HAIL!

IF you live in Alvechurch and weren't sure what all the shouting was about one February Saturday evening, or who that figure dressed in leaves and carrying a rather impressive staff was, then you might be relieved to hear that it was a group of villagers, conducting a Wassail to cheer on a fruitful harvest for 2023.

The Wassail, which is organised by Aelfgythe Border Morris group, is a traditional festival held in winter, where villagers gather to sing, dance and shout to "wake up" the trees from their slumber and scare away evil spirits which may cause crops to fail.

The festival began at The Crown Inn, with villagers gathering on the streets of Withybed, many with drinks in hand (it almost felt reminiscent of *Alvechurch Alight*, for those who remember it).

After a quick introduction by the "Green Man" (the Master of Ceremonies for the event), Aelfgythe opened the dancing. They were joined by other Morris sides including the Alvechurch Morris Men, Ragged Oak and Jockey Morris, all who performed excellent traditional dances.

If the aim of the Wassail was to be as noisy as possible to ward off evil spirits, *The Village* can confirm that the groups couldn't have failed, with cheery and raucous dancing, shouting and hitting sticks so hard they splintered into the street.

Some villagers, who had just popped to The Crown for a drink were thrilled to find they had inadvertently stumbled upon a Wassail.

After the Morris groups had spent more than an hour entertaining villagers, and darkness had begun to fall, the dancers, musicians and Sealed Knot musketeers mingled with the crowd. Villagers were led out of Withybed by the Green Man and torch bearers through the streets to The Weighbridge, on the other side of the village.

As they made their way, shouts of "Wassail" by the Green Man were met with "drink hail!" by the procession, which is the traditional old English reply to a drinking pledge or a Wassail.

At The Weighbridge, the Alvechurch Choir entertained the crowds who were then invited to dress a tree with toast on its branches, the tradition during a Wassail to attract the friendly spirits and prompt a bountiful harvest.

A line of musketeers primed their long guns with muzzle-loaded powder filling the air with smoke as they lit up the field.

Members of the crowd remarked how wonderful Aelfgythe's Wassail was, to bring villagers onto the streets of Alvechurch for an evening of fun and an added bonus of warding off evil . . .

Ready to begin : Aelfgythe prepare to start the festivities.

What an instrument: with a Morris dancer silhouette.

A wassail well done: Aelfgythe gather to celebrate a fantastic event.

An evening of banishing evil: Makes for happy silver faces.

Smells like Bonfire night: The Sealed Knot take aim and fire.

Left: Revellers hang toast on the tree to entice friendly spirits and promote a fruitful harvest.
Above: The Green Man and torch bearers lead the procession out of Withybed.

Clockwise from above left : The procession makes their way through the village,
The Morris Men brandish their sticks,
Ragged Oak Morris Group splinter sticks into the road,
Aelfgythe introduce their dancers,
The Sealed Knot musketeers get ready to join in the festivities,
Alvechurch Community Choir look cheery,
Aelfgythe pictured mid-dance,
A young villager tests the toast offerings.

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FOCUS ON YOUR VISION

Unless your vision has changed, you might not give your eyes much thought when it comes to health. But your eyes can actually tell a lot about your general wellbeing, even if they don't feel any different. That's why it's so important to have regular eye examinations.

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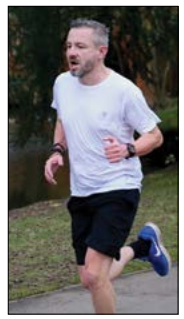

IF you're awake early, some of you might have spotted father-of-two Dean Chilton-Davies, aged 43, running through the streets of Alvechurch and Barnt Green in preparation for this year's London Marathon.

More than 40,000 runners will hit the streets of London for the event and this will be Dean's "first and last" (in his own words) marathon, having always wanted to tick it off his "bucket list".

Dean said: "As the weeks get closer and the training gets harder, it can be tough to get up and go out in the morning but once I'm up and I see fellow residents running or walking their dogs, often passing with a good morning, or a wave it makes my the day.

"It's so nice to be able to run around the village at this time of year, even if a little bit cold at the moment".

Dean will be running the marathon to raise money for the charity MACS, which supports children born with eyesight deficiencies.

■ **You can find Dean's fundraising page by searching "Dean Chilton-Davies" at: www.2023tcslondonmarathon.enthuse.com**

BLOOMING BLOSSOM CORRIDOR

JUST beyond Bridge 60 along the canal in Alvechurch, a plum orchard grew. Over the years this has been torn out, but now the Canal and River Trust, using a special grant, is working to replace the lost fruit trees

The Trust couldn't locate the original type of plum tree, Warwickshire Droopers, but a mixture of plum, apple and pear trees have now been planted along the stretch of canal near Bridge 60, which is just over the road from Alvechurch rail station.

The stretch, previously covered in overgrown brambles and matted undergrowth, was cleared of litter and the brambles closest to the towpath to clear space for the new "pocket orchard".

A team from the Canal and River Trust, joined by volunteers from the Worcester-Brimingham & Droitwich Canals Society carried out the clearing and planting.

Emily Cowell, from the trust said: "We have a variety of plums, apples and pear trees, they all flower at different times throughout the season . . . it will be three or four years before they look like proper trees though."

Ready to go: Members of the Canal and River Trust, with volunteers.

Emily told *The Village* this orchard is part of a much larger project called the "Great Canal Orchard", which will stretch 50 miles along the canal network from Wolverhampton to Worcester. They have so far been working to connect Tibberton in Bromsgrove with Bittel in Barnt Green with pocket orchards. *The Village* nature columnist Mary Green, who has been invested in replacing the plum orchard for some years, said the new trees would provide a beautiful "blossom corridor" along the canal, wonderful for families and walkers to enjoy.

Next time you walk along the canal, look out for the new trees. Currently small and protected by plastic casing, in 10 years time you may be able to pick fruit from the growing trees here.

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Make a difference

Dear Editor – May I ask your readers a few questions?

Are you passionate about your community? Do you have concerns about a specific issue where you live and want to do something about it? Do you want to help make a long-lasting change?

Parish councils are looking for people with varying backgrounds and experiences who reflect their community to put themselves forward for election.

Local councils run numerous services, depending on the size of the council. Many you will see day-to-day, but some are less known.

These include introducing solar panels, setting up dementia-friendly groups, organising community buses, creating neighbourhood plans, implementing suitable housing, establishing youth projects, managing allotments and open spaces, maintaining footpaths, public seating, and litter bins.

There will be vacancies arising in the parish councils in the neighbourhoods where you live. Please ask the clerk of your parish pouncil for details.

Elections are on 4th May 2023.

To find out more visit: www.nalc.gov.uk/elections

Coun (Dr) Bakul Kumar
Chair of Lickey & Blackwell Parish Council and Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils

Light concerns

Dear Editor – I've noticed that in Cofton Hackett, the parish council has started to change the street lamp bulbs when they need replacing to low energy LEDs. However, they're white and not orange like the bulbs they replace.

This could be an issue for wildlife especially bats – and I'm sure that residents like me have seen them flying over gardens summer evenings just as the sun is going down.

(My neighbour's cats like to visit me in my garden and try their luck at catching these bats but the big orange chap has just put too much weight on and despite his best efforts can never quite make it. The others don't fare much better, they're too well looked after!)

The county council is replacing bulbs with orange or red LEDs which solves the problem and is far less intrusive for humans, too.

I hope the parish council will follow this example and in future use red or orange LED bulb replacements when required.

Finally I was interested in published details of Dellow Motors in the last issue of *The Village* and had no idea they produced a sports car in Alvechurch.

I am a classic car fan and never do normal. My field of interest is Reliant and I've owned ten of them to date and still have two, a Robin Hatchback 1999 model and Rialto Estate 1987.

Have your say . . . about anything!

email: editor@villageonline.co.uk
or write to: Letters, The Village, The Limes, Swan Street, Alvechurch B48 7RR

Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication. We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.
The deadline for the next issue is March 10th 2023.

WHERE'S VINNY?

LAURA Gorton, aged four, from Barnt Green, shows off the Mini Vinny she won in February's hunt the hedgehog competition in *The Village*. Laura's older sister won her own hedgehog through *The Village* a few years ago and now another Vinny will join the family.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).

Tell us where he's hiding via email or post – see details on bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date is midnight on March 6 2023. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

They don't get used much this time of year but will be out and about soon.

It's unfortunate that the British car industry has seen better days and many well know names have gone.

The closure of Longbridge early this century was a shock to the local community and it will take time to recover.

John A Ridarta, Cofton Hackett

Missing the 146

Dear Editor – I wonder if they will ever restore the 146 bus service, which I used to use between Alvechurch and Redditch? I have to use the train nowadays.

Mark Williams, Alvechurch

Shame the motorists

Dear Editor – It is quite obvious that the majority of car drivers ignore the 20mph speed limit through the village of Alvechurch. The police cannot enforce any penalties, only speak to offender. Vehiscle activated speed signs have limited effect and the traffic calming does not deter.

Can I suggest that all of the aforementioned be scrapped and the costs saved put towards a large digital sign that displays the number of motorists who exceed the 20mph speed limit each day. Perhaps the numbers displayed might actually embarrass and shame more into adhering to the law than breaking it.

Mike Betts
Alvechurch

Green Belt visitors

Dear Editor – I think this picture (below) shows very well the importance of the Green Belt's preservation. That land is home to so many species of animals and once concreted over, their habitats are lost. Roe deers are regularly visiting gardens in Bordesley.

Alex Nowek, Bordesley

A young roe buck resting in a Bordesley garden. *Picture/Alex Nowek*

20 From The Village archive Years Ago

THE COVER of the March 2003 issue depicts the Grade II listed windmill at Weatheroak Hill. Plans were proposed by its owner, Bournville Village Trust, to turn the disused landmark into a residential property, with spectacular views across the Arrow Valley.

The tower-style mill was constructed in the early part of the 19th century, and is thought to have still been in use until the mid-1880s. It was then converted into a water tower by the Trust in 1948 to serve local needs, but had been redundant since a purpose-built tower opened nearby.

THE VERSATILE SPORTS CAR

Following *The Village's* story about Dellow Motors in the previous issue, the theme of sports cars continued into March 2003. James Harvey continued the history of Alvechurch's own sports car, and the sport of "trials". Dellows were designed to appeal to the owner who wanted a car to double as daily transport and be a competitive trials car at the weekend.

Today, a sporting trials car is far removed from the original concept of a production car used in the old reliability trials. After WWII, the first post-war race was organised in Jersey in 1946, and despite the chronic shortages after the war, particularly petrol, interest in competitive motor sport was undiminshed. Into this climate Ken Delingpole and Ron Lowe formed Dellow Motors Ltd.

SAUSAGES ARE TOP DOGS

Alvechurch butchers E J Crow & Son won the Four Counties Gold Awards for Excellence in Meat Products with their traditional pork sausages and home-cured bacon.

This was the third time the sausages had won the top prize, and the second time for the bacon. Crow's also won a Silver Award for their lamb and mint burgers. Manager Paul Queen (pictured) said he was delighted.

10 From The Village archive Years Ago

THE COVER of our March 2013 issue was a great picture of water droplets by reader Dennis Brown following a wet February.

SHOOT FIRST

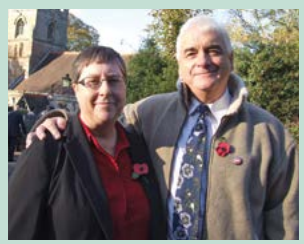
Alvechurch resident, John Williams (below, right) , gave *The Village* a preview of his upcoming talk on life as a BBC cameraman.

John spent 30 years working for the BBC in Birmingham as a cameraman, and ended up living in Alvechurch by chance, ending up in the village after a wrong turn on his way home to Bristol.

However, John spent much of his time working away, travelling the world from the backstreets of Belfast to the icy wastes of Antarctica.

His family stayed in Alvechurch, never quite sure where John would be taken from one week to the next. He told *The Village* about his first trip, which was to Hong Kong to film a documentary on the police, corruption and Triads, and how flying into the then-airport, "dropping like a stone" between buildings was a hair-raising experience.

WATCHING THE SKIES



An Alvechurch couple, retired police offer John Hanson and his partner Dawn Holloway were working on recording the history of British UFO sightings since 1940.

John and Dawn had previously featured in *The Village* in 2011, and since then had documented many hundreds - if not thousands - of sighting reports in their volumes *Haunted Skies: The Encyclopaedia of British UFOs*. John believed that UFO sightings go back many thousands of years but the *Haunted Skies* series concentrates on documented reports from the 1940s onwards. Those who report UFO sightings are often dismissed as crackpots, but there are plenty of anecdotes from trusted members of the community. As a result of an appeal in a police magazine, John and Dawn were contacted by a number of officers relaying their tales of strange things they'd seen . . .

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STEP INTO SPRING

FINALLY, spring feels like it's on the horizon . . . almost, anyway. When it's warmer, the days are longer, and flowers are springing, it feels like there's a newfound motivation to make changes. Maybe that's to do with all the new life blooming around us, or maybe it's just that the days feel longer and we have more time?

The Village spoke with Jenny Powell who owns "Jenny's Beauty", a relaxing and friendly home salon based in Barnt Green (*image, right*).

Jenny told us that one of the best ways to 'step into spring' and prepare for the warmer weather is to give your feet a bit of extra attention. It won't be long until wellies and boots are put away for a few months and we're dusting off our sandals.

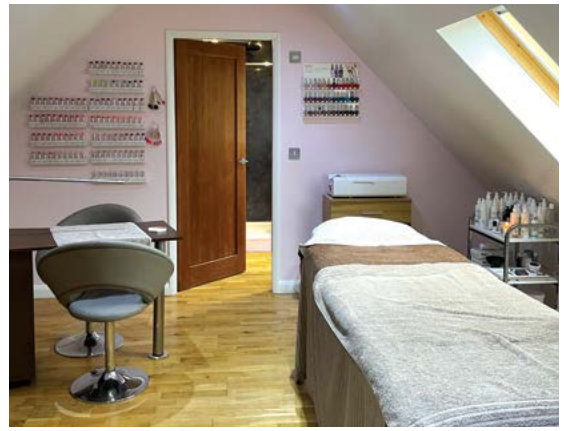
TOP TOE TIPS

Jenny gave us her top tips for taking care of your toes this spring, most of which you can do from home:

1. Remove any old polish from the toes using acetone free nail polish remover. Make sure to remove every last bit so the nails are nice and clean.
2. Soak your feet in whatever you have around the house: a foot spa or even a washing up bowl would work. You could add some nice bath salts to make it feel like you're at the salon.
3. Dry your feet well and use a foot file or pumice stone to remove hard skin.
4. Cut your nails and use a nail file to get them nice and even.
5. Leave the cuticle prep to a professional!
6. Massage in some nice foot cream.
7. Wipe over with your non acetone polish remover to remove any grease off the nail plate.
8. Choose your colour, always remember to use a base coat and a top coat. The base coat will help your nails from becoming discoloured as well as helping your polish to last longer. The top coat will protect your colour and give the nails a lovely shine.
9. Once the nails are dry apply a drop of nail oil to each nail to show the cuticles some love and to keep the nails nice and healthy.

Even with days that feel longer, around work and other commitments it can be hard to find the time to get out of the house for any beauty treatment sometimes, but perhaps these tips will help inspire you to take a little "me time" this spring, to give your toes a pamper, or soak in the bath with a face-mask.

Not every pamper session has to be done in a salon, as Jenny has pointed out, and many can be done using things around the house – we think it's the best way to use a washing up bowl!



■ **For more information on Jenny's Beauty, visit her Facebook page www.facebook.com/jensbeauty**

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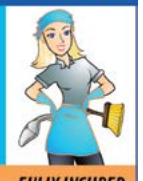

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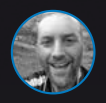
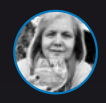


Martin Pryor

Financial Planner & Adviser

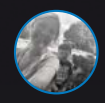
Business & Finance degree to Graduate training course at Prudential, leading to becoming a qualified independent financial adviser in 1996 and setting up PPM Financial Planning in 2006.



Nicky Lowndes

General Manager

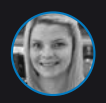
Nicky has been at PPM Financial Planning since the very beginning in 2006 bringing with her 19 years of banking experience with HSBC.



Laura Siddall

Financial Planner & Adviser

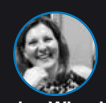
Laura has 19 years of industry experience. Her role is to construct financial plans for clients using our cash flow modelling software, helping deliver true financial planning.



Laura Daniels

Mortgage Adviser

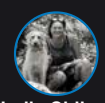
Laura joined in 2016, providing admin support whilst completing training to become our qualified mortgage broker.



Louise Wheeler

Paraplanner

Louise Joined PPM in September 2021, bringing with her 8 years of paraplanning experience and 13 years working within financial services.



Jodie Chilcott

Office Administrator

Jodie joined PPM from an accountancy background and performs a variety of tasks in the day to day running of the business.

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How financial advice repays you in gains

LAST month we talked about the lifestyle and wellbeing benefits of seeking financial advice. This month we explain the financial benefits of engaging with a financial planner.

The good news is that research shows that seeking financial advice can help your money go further. In short, financial advice provides an opportunity to grow your wealth, and there are plenty of studies to back this claim up.

Research from VouchedFor found the advised investors generated 27% higher returns over 12 months compared to those who chose to take a DIY approach. These findings are reflected when it comes to pensions too.

A study found those who took advice on pension saving near the start of their career saved an average of £34,300 more, not including tax relief or compound interest, than those who took no advice.

The value of financial advice is also something think tank the International Longevity Centre has studied. The study tracked individuals who received financial advice between 2001 and 2006 and then followed up to see how their wealth had changed by 2014/16. The findings demonstrated that professional advice can improve financial security in retirement, both in terms of pension savings and other assets.

The 2019 report found:

■ Receiving professional financial advice between 2001 and 2006 resulted in an average total boost to wealth (in pensions and financial assets) of £47,706;

■ The benefits of financial advice are potentially greater for those deemed "just getting by". This group saw a 24% increase in their pension wealth, compared to 11% for more affluent groups;

■ An ongoing relationship with a financial adviser led to better financial outcomes. Those who were receiving advice at both points of the study had nearly 50% higher wealth than those only advised at the start.

In part two on the importance of financial planning, **Martin Pryor** outlines the advantages.

David Sinclair, Director at the International Longevity Centre, said: "The simple fact is that those who take advice are likely to be richer in retirement. But it is still the case that far too many people who take out investments and pensions do not seek financial advice. And only a minority of the population has seen a financial adviser."

For those who don't seek financial advice, it's often the cost of a financial adviser that's cited as the reason why.

Yet, this misses the financial value that advice brings. The research clearly shows that for the majority of people, the gains they receive from taking financial advice far outweighs the initial and ongoing costs associated with advice.

HOW DOES FINANCIAL ADVICE HELP GROW YOUR WEALTH?

So, how does financial advice help increase your assets? After all, you can increase pension contributions and invest without taking financial advice and there's a plethora of information available.

While it's true you can take action yourself, the world of finance can be complex and filled with jargon. A financial adviser helps you cut through all this to formulate a financial plan that's right for you. With knowledge on regulations, allowances and legislation, a financial adviser can help you make the most of things like tax breaks to help your money go further.

Even if you're confident handling your own finances, having a professional to speak to about your plan can be useful. A financial adviser will be able to offer a different perspective and help you to avoid common mistakes.

Financial planning done correctly is also time consuming and complex. Do you really want to spend your time researching investment opportunities and keeping up to date with legislation changes?

Finally, while you can find plenty of financial advice and tips from other sources, this isn't tailored to you. What suits one person, may not be appropriate for you. A financial adviser will make recommendations and create a long-term plan with your current circumstances and aspirations at the centre. As a result, the final plan can help you to move forward in a way that takes you towards your goals.

Martin Pryor

Lifestyle Financial Planner

For more information, please contact us

Tel: 07961 162818

martinpryor@ppmfinancialplanning.com

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The Value of your investments can go down as well as up and you may not get back the full amount you invested. You should seek independent financial advice if you are unsure of the right decision for your circumstances.

Lifetime mortgages: help with finances in later life

AS we move into spring it is a particularly busy time in the mortgage market, more properties become available and people look at moving home or re-financing their existing mortgage. Now, more than ever, it is important to ensure that you are getting the best deal.

I often get asked, why do people look to take out equity release plans? I have listed below some reasons why my clients have taken out this type of mortgage:

■ I recently had a couple who were looking to move home, however due to the fact that they were looking to retire shortly and had limited pension income, they could not get a standard mortgage. They did however qualify for a equity release mortgage as these are not linked to income. In their case they were happy to pay the interest so we were able to set up the mortgage with an interest-paying option.

■ I had a lady who wanted to help her daughter get on to the property ladder, she did not want to use her savings, so opted for an equity release mortgage instead. She was able to use the value of her property to release funds that enabled her daughter to put down a deposit and buy her own home.

■ A couple came to see me as they wanted to see if equity release was an option as opposed to downsizing. They loved where they lived as it was near friends and family, but the house needed work, they also wanted to update their car and have funds available for future travel. I was able to release funds for them to help solve their immediate needs with their home and car, as well as setting up a facility of funds that could be drawn down in the future as and when required.

Mark Meads (right) is here to help you as you navigate mortgages throughout your life.

Everyone's circumstances are different, that is why I sit down with clients to look at the best options for them as individuals. If you would like to have a free initial consultation to see if equity release is right for you please contact me on 0121 445 1227.

Please call us on: 0121 445 1227. Or contact via the website: www.villagefinancial.co.uk

This firm usually charges a fee for mortgage advice. The amount of the fee will depend upon your needs and circumstances. This will be discussed and agreed with you at the earliest opportunity. Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up payments on your mortgage. An Equity Release product will reduce the value of your estate, will not be suitable for everyone and may affect your entitlement to state benefits. To understand the features and risks please ask for a personalised illustration. Village Financial Solutions Ltd is an appointed representative of PRIMIS Mortgage Network. PRIMIS Mortgage Network is a trading style of Personal Touch Financial Services Limited, which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

A sky to learn from

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.

SO our little planet continues its march around the Sun and as it does so, it starts to point its North Pole a little more towards our nearest star.

It reaches the halfway point at the Spring Equinox and this happens on the 20th of March at 21:24 to be precise, although the day which is closest to having 12 hours of daylight is the 18th. The wonders of our wobbly orbited planet.

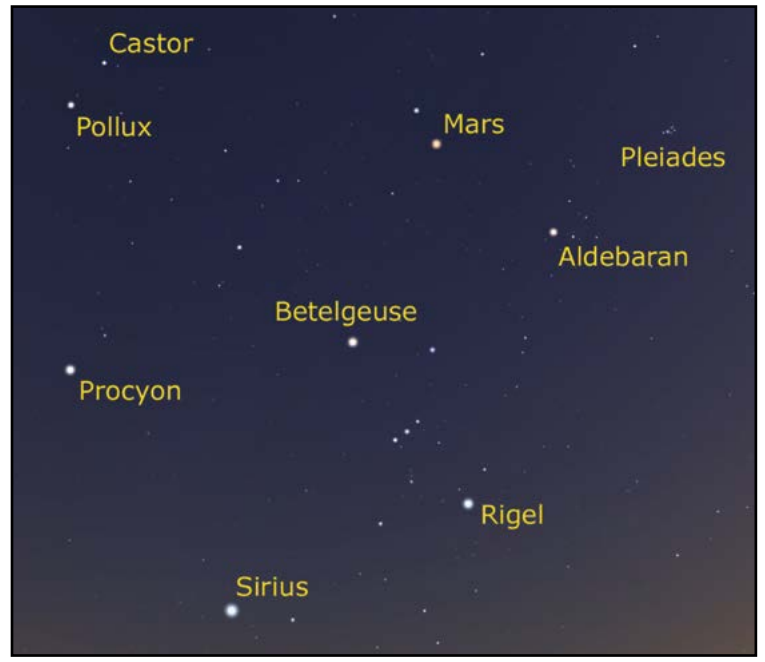
We put our clocks forward quite early this year, too, the last Sunday of the month being the 26th.

Your last chance to see Jupiter in the evening sky is during the first week or so of the month as it sinks lower into the sunset each evening. Start looking as soon as the Sun has gone at around six and there in the red glow of the western sky are two bright objects.

On the 1st, they are practically side by side, but day by day they separate, with the brighter of the two, Venus, rising a little each day, leaving poor old Jupiter to descend into the mire. Don't worry, like a certain famous cyborg, he'll be back.

So, the brightest object in our evening sky becomes that enigmatic planet, Venus. Because it is so low and obvious, even before it has gone dark, it gets noticed and I can guarantee I will be asked what it is. It certainly is a strange world with an atmosphere so dense that the pressure on its surface is like being at 3,000 feet underwater on Earth, with a temperature of 450C.

In the 1960s, it was a bit of a jinxed destination for space probes too, with only five spacecraft out of 18 launches making it. Two later Russian probes could not take any pictures because their camera lens caps failed to detach.



A full sky: Featuring the brightest star, Sirius towards the bottom. *Pictures courtesy of NASA.*

Mars had a similar failure rate at that time, too, with only three successes out of 13. It now has dozens of probes orbiting and several landers on its surface. It is still visible high in our southern skies, as soon as it starts to get properly dark. It is in amongst several bright stars, including the brightest of all, Sirius – but Mars is, without doubt, the most orange of them.

This is a wonderful part of the sky with that misty cluster of stars, the Pleiades, up to the right. It is thought that this little group is so young that the dinosaurs wouldn't have been able to see them.

A little lower and to the left is Aldebaran in Taurus, then Betelgeuse in Orion with Rigel below. Left and lower is Sirius, unmistakable being so bright with a blueish tinge.

Compare it to the red giants above. A little higher and to the left is Procyon and much higher, Pollux and Castor, the heads of the twins of Gemini.

The path of the planets: See Venus and Jupiter in March.

Learning your way round this patch of sky will enable you to identify the various stars. This can be great fun if you're out late in the evening with friends. Try it.

The anonymous birder

How to enjoy village birdlife

Tune in to dawn chorus

I hope your Big Garden Birdwatch was more exciting than mine. I saw the grand total of one great tit and two magpies in an hour . . . not even a wood pigeon.

This modest list is mainly down to not using a bird feeder for a while now, as I'm concerned about the effect of the *trichomonosis* parasite which has greatly affected some garden bird species, particularly greenfinch and chaffinch. (Please follow the RSPB/BTO advice if you are feeding your garden birds.)

I relied on leaving a fall of apples which has attracted lots of blackbirds, redwings and fieldfares this winter. None of which turned out to support me on the BGB. My wife even videoed a garden full of thrushes the next morning just to rub it in. As I said, nil return is still a valid result for the scientists who are grateful for the data.

As spring arrives, my thoughts turn to birdsong and the rising crescendo of the dawn chorus, which is building to a glorious peak in early June. Birdsong has three functions: 1– To attract a mate; 2 – To warn other birds that, "this territory is taken thank you very much"; and 3 – To make us feel better.

In the main, male birds do the singing and develop their repertoire as they mature. Females can detect an eligible male by the complexity and delivery of their song. Spring is a great time to start identifying birds with your ears. You don't need binoculars or 20:20 vision and from Christmas until the end of the breeding season the band is always playing.

A good way to start is by getting to know the most common birdsong. then when something different occurs you will notice that, too. It is obvious, but linking the ones you can see whilst they are singing and having a mental "hook" to remember the song will help.

For example, the robin's song is a "watery", unhurried warble with plenty of gaps and the blackbird, fond of performing in the evening before dusk from a high singing post, has a jazz-like nonchalance. Or the tinkling of wind chimes for a group of goldfinches. Well, this is what they sound like to me!

A great tit takes flight – after being attracted by a feeder.
Picture/*Dennis Brown*

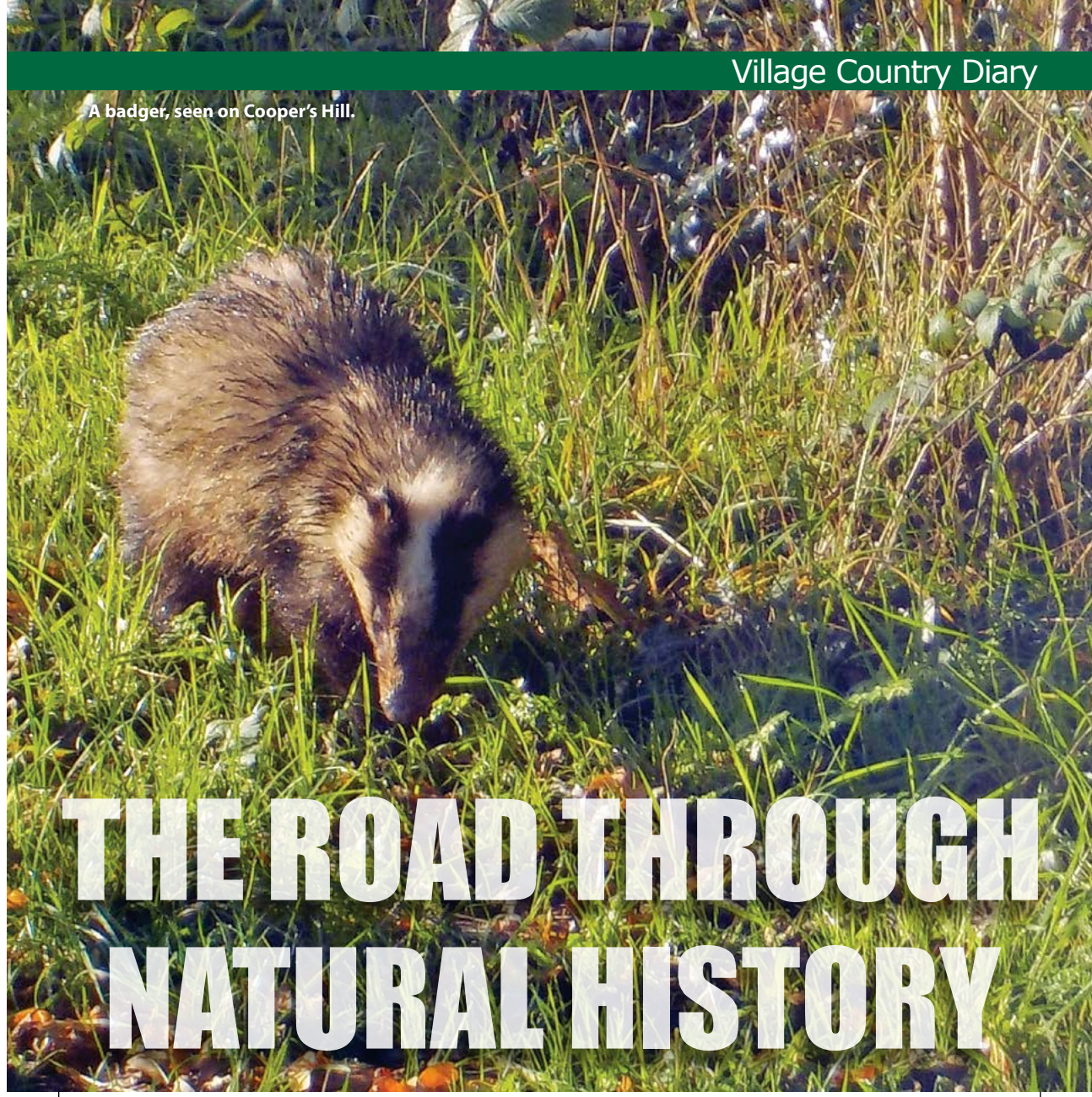
There are many well established sound "mnemonics" for birdsong which may work for you. "Teacher, teacher" for great tit, "Chiswick" repeated for pied wagtails and the cricketer's bowl for Chaffinch – the rhythm of their song being a gradual build-up, like the run-up and a flourish at the end as the ball is windmilled down the wicket.

This rhythmic approach works for the song thrush, too. A lead singer in the bird world often repeating its elaborate phrases in threes at high volume.

Some birds are conveniently named after their song. We all know the cuckoo although you are lucky if you hear one regularly these days. Other common species such as the jackdaw can be separated from other corvids with its "Chack Chack" call in flocks. Listen out in mid-March for chiff chaffs, the first visiting warbler of the year beckoning warmer weather with its sharp, repetitive two syllable name call. Identifying warblers such as whitethroats, willow warblers and blackcaps is actually easier through sound as they are small and often remain hidden by the summer foliage.

Checking and learning birdsong is very accessible now. My first guide was a double CD of British Birdsong downloaded on to an iPod – a magical item which allowed you to carry all the songs in your pocket. This led to some strange shuffle playlists on holiday drives with arbitrary birdsong clips cropping up between tracks. This method of bird ID can get addictive and you may find yourself absentmindedly recognising birdsong on the soundtracks of TV series and films, mumbling to yourself that swifts just wouldn't be in the UK in the autumn. You are beyond help at that point! **JL**

If you would like delve deeper into the wonderful soundscape of birds and begin to recognise the common singers, I'll be doing some spring walks on* The Village *patch. Please email* editor@villageonline.co.uk *if you would like more details.



A badger, seen on Cooper's Hill.

THE ROAD THROUGH NATURAL HISTORY

Mary Green leads us up a hill with ancient woodland, rolling fields and plenty to discover along the way.

WITH mild weather and frosts alternating, most wildlife is on track for a normal spring emergence as I write. Candlemas Day was neither rainy nor fair and bright, so who knows what we have in store! I was pleased to be involved in the planting of orchard trees along the canal in Alvechurch, and hope they thrive.

This month I am walking up Cooper's Hill out of Alvechurch. It's one of the old routes into the village from Bromsgrove and Tardebigge and in more recent times Barnt Green. It's an unusually biodiverse road as the vegetation on both sides has been managed in a way that's good for wildlife. It also shows interesting farming patterns. It's a pleasure after the often over-flailed hedges and monoculture of other walks round here.

I'll start where Callow Hill Road becomes Cooper's Hill by the canal bridge, Bridge 64. The cottages by the

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bridge were originally the stables for Callow Hill/ Cooper's Hill Wharf on the canal, used for a farming and coal business. There's a lovely alder tree by the bridge which you can get close to, to see the catkins and new leaves in spring.

As you walk up past the cottages there is tree cover which looks rather unimpressive these days, but it was old woodland. There are some remaining old trees and some later planted non-native ones, and holly trees forming an understory. Under them now you will find the new leaves of bluebells coming up, a sure sign of old woodland. Then there are some lovely cherry-plum trees, which will be flowering in early March.

As you go on up, the lane is altered by the construction for the motorway nearby in the 1980s when they must have cut down woodland. However, the replanting was done really well. The trees on the right as you walk up are all native, and are very varied, including oak, ash, apple, field maple, hazel, birch, holly, wild cherry, cherry-plum, elder and rowan. More important, they are allowed to grow fully and flower and fruit, only being lightly trimmed back if they get too near the road. This sort of recently planted wood does not have much variety of ground flowers yet, but in one spot there is a little patch of bluebells showing that it was originally wooded.

The trees on the other side are good too, the mixture including guelder rose trees. They run alongside the land of the Withybed marina and again are growing to their full height and full of flowers through the spring and berries later in the year.

All these trees are always full of song birds. You hear them a lot in spring, and I have often heard the first chiff-chaffs here. These are something to listen out for at this time as they are spring arrivals. They make a distinctive "chiff-chaff" bouncy two-tone call. They're hard to spot, being little brown jobs, but easy to hear.

Past the Sandhills turn the trees get older again. There are well established oaks and ashes here that I always look

Cooper's Hill Wharf: Cottages here originally used for farming, now set beautifully on the canal.

Tree cover: Once old woodland on Cooper's Hill, now a mix of old and non-native trees.

at to see which comes into leaf first – nearly always the oak these days. Oaks are more affected by temperature so come out earlier in a warm year, whereas ash are more influenced by light so come out at a similar time each year. Both tend to be early in a bright sunny spring. Some of the trees here are not old natives though. Those on the left side include some fine specimens of introduced conifers round the gardens of the big houses – the Victorian and Edwardian "gentlemen's residences" that are typical of this bit of road.

There are nearly always squirrels about in the trees. Of course, they are greys, since we lost our red squirrels many years ago in this area, but they are part of our ecology now. They take acorns and other nuts and fruit and bury them to eat later, thus spreading the seeds as they don't remember to fetch them quite all out again!

Past the houses, on the left is some well-established laid hedging. About ten to 15 years ago there was quite a bit of hedge laying round Alvechurch. Unfortunately, in some places once the hedge has grown it is then just flailed and become useless for wildlife. Maintaining a laid hedge properly means re-weaving some branches and trimming others, so needs doing by hand. The hedges on Cooper's Hill farm are mostly good and you can look across the fields here and see where all the hedges are well kept and will later in the year be flowering and fruiting.

Soon on the right is some recently laid hedge, done last year. It looked

Cooper's Hill Longhorn: Seen from the side of the road, grazing by oak trees and a laid hedge.

Cherry plum blossom: Blooming on the roadside

Marshy fields: With a good flowering hedge.

Newly laid hedge: Branches woven together.

very drastic at first, like all hedge laying – the hedger cuts almost through the branches before weaving them together. But it flowered and fruited during last year and will do even better this year. It's part of an old double hedge, where some new trees have been planted too.

I talked to the hedge layer last year. He said although it may cost more in labour to have him lay a hedge rather than just drive a tractor along it with a flail every year, it was perhaps not really so. If you count in the costs of producing the vehicles and mechanical equipment and their fuel, with all their cost to the environment too, it may in the end save money and resources to have a person spend a day working their way along the hedge.

When you look back at the trees and hedges up this relatively short stretch of road, you can see something that not only hosts varied wildlife but traps the pollution from road vehicles here and on the nearby motorway, and captures lots of carbon through its well established roots. Looking after this is just as important as planting more trees, possibly more so, and relatively inexpensive on fuel and other resources.

The fields on the right are different from those on the left. The left ones are good pasture, grazed by long horn cattle, belonging to Cooper's Hill Farm, much of which is in environmental stewardship. Those on the right are also sometimes grazed by these cattle, but look more like marshy moorland. They have tufts of sedges and reeds and none of the ground flora of old pasture land. The soil must be different, possibly more

Flowering: Established laid hedge.

acidic. And I wonder if this part was still wooded later than the other and hasn't fully developed as pasture.

What makes me think this is that further up there is a sizeable patch of ancient woodland on the right, going back to the motorway, a dedicated Local Wildlife Site. It's clear all this area was once part of the ancient Midland

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forest, and this one piece has been saved. You can see the bluebells in spring, and there are many old trees here as well as new growth and a good understory of smaller trees. It's a very atmospheric place, a complex of plants at all levels and full of insects, birds and mammals. There is also a patch of bilberries on one side, which does suggest a different type of soil which might extend into the nearby farmland.

It's so full of wildlife that I was walking past it recently in broad daylight and there was a badger snuffling about on the verge.

The only aspect of this road which is not so good is the verges. Most of them look as if they were once quite biodiverse, and I have found some interesting species there. But they are not allowed to grow enough. Many of them are driven over and churned up because the road is quite narrow and carries some heavy vehicles. They are frequently dug up for utilities too and are mowed during the growing season. The trees compensate for this to a degree, but there is a lack of cover and food for many insects that should be there. Once the trees have finished flowering in summer there is often little flowering here.

Cutting hay: In fields near Cooper's Hill

Once you pass Foxhill Lane and the bridleway to Barnt Green opposite, the farming is different. The hedges are flailed and there is less wildlife. The grazed land is not very diverse and further on there is weed-killed arable land. The road is renamed and becomes Wheeley Road. There are still some great trees, though, including some wonderful old oaks on the left and, much further up, some sweet chestnuts. But it's not Cooper's Hill any more.

■ I wrote the poem below for a recent Withybed Poets session on early memories. It follows a visit with my family to the street where I was born in Birmingham.

First Words

We visit the street where we were born.
My sister says that she remembers the plants -
The wild barley growing in pavement cracks
The avenue of lime trees. I think.
Me, four years old. I remember the words.
The next street is Lodge Drive, and there it is.
I didn't know the word Lodge and then it came in a book
Mr Podge of Oak Tree Lodge. So now I knew the meaning
The home of Mr Podge was round the corner.
Further down the road was The Swan.
There wasn't a swan of course
Or even a pond. There was a library though
Where I went for my books. And Mr Podge.
Before we left for the farm I sat with mum
By the fire, pencil and paper, making a list
Of all the animals we would have there.
I spelled out horse and cow.
Mum said bull, but I wasn't sure about that
So I asked if I could put bull in two Cs
She told me those were brackets.
There was a bull, when we got there. Not in brackets.
He was called George. And the sheep dog was Tip.
Like every other bull and dog before
Who had been George and Tip. Both scared me.
George didn't last long, replaced by AI man. I didn't ask.
Where we lived now the words were different.
They said plimsolls instead of pumps and I lost mine
They called potatoes teddies and I was a little maid.
I went into school and they put me in the babies' class
To play with plasticine. I asked what they were making
And they said Moses in the bulrushes.
I couldn't see any mouses, and anyway
I knew by then that you should call them mice.
When they found I could read, they put me up a class
And I brought in flowers for the nature table
Telling my teacher their names. Without brackets.

NOW IT'S DRY FEBRUARY!

Alvechurch amateur weatherman **Phil Thomas** records the changes.

JANUARY was a month of two halves, the first half of the month was very mild up to the 14th, where it then became much colder towards the end of the month.

You might remember the start of 2023 as being very wet . . . nearly all the month's rainfall fell up to the 14th of the month (68.7mm) making for a wet few weeks, followed by only 1.5mm of rainfall up to the end of January.

The drier second half of the month was due to a large area of high pressure which blocked the Atlantic weather systems which are usually seen at this time of year.

With 73.5 hours of sunshine during January, making up 125% of the average sunshine, it was exceptionally sunny for the the month.

Conditions going into February, up to the 15th, were also exceptionally dry, with no recorded rainfall locally.

Once again, the lack of rainfall was due to a "blocking" high pressure area near or on top of the UK. This kept conditions frosty but mostly dry.

Most villagers will have experienced many gloriously frosty mornings in February, and likely had to de-ice their cars more often than during January.

The Outlook

AS WE progress into March, high pressure is expected to develop in the north of the UK and low pressure in the south.

This is likely to introduce a north-south split, with drier conditions across the north, and wetter conditions in the south (it usually feels like it's the other way around!).

Temperatures are expected to be mostly around average for the time of year, but a period of colder (or even much colder) temperatures remains a small possibility and could bring spells of wintery weather as we enter into the spring months . . . so don't put away your winter coats just yet!

Above: Frosty trees, a common sight in the first half of February.

Mist drifts over Newbourne hill and woods, looking towards Rowney Green.

January 2023

Mean Max	8.2C	1.2C above average
Mean Min	1.8C	1.0C above average
Mean	5.0C	0.7C above average
Rainfall	70.2mm	94% of average
Sunshine	73.5hrs	125% of average

February 2023 (to the 15th)

Mean Max	9.0C	1.2C above average
Mean Min	1.5C	0.2C below average
Mean	5.2C	0.5C above average
Rainfall (Trace only)	0mm	0% of average
Sunshine	55.2hrs	74% of average

More information at ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com*** You can see an improved HD weather-cam, updated at one-minute intervals, at: ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com/webcam_alvechurch.php***

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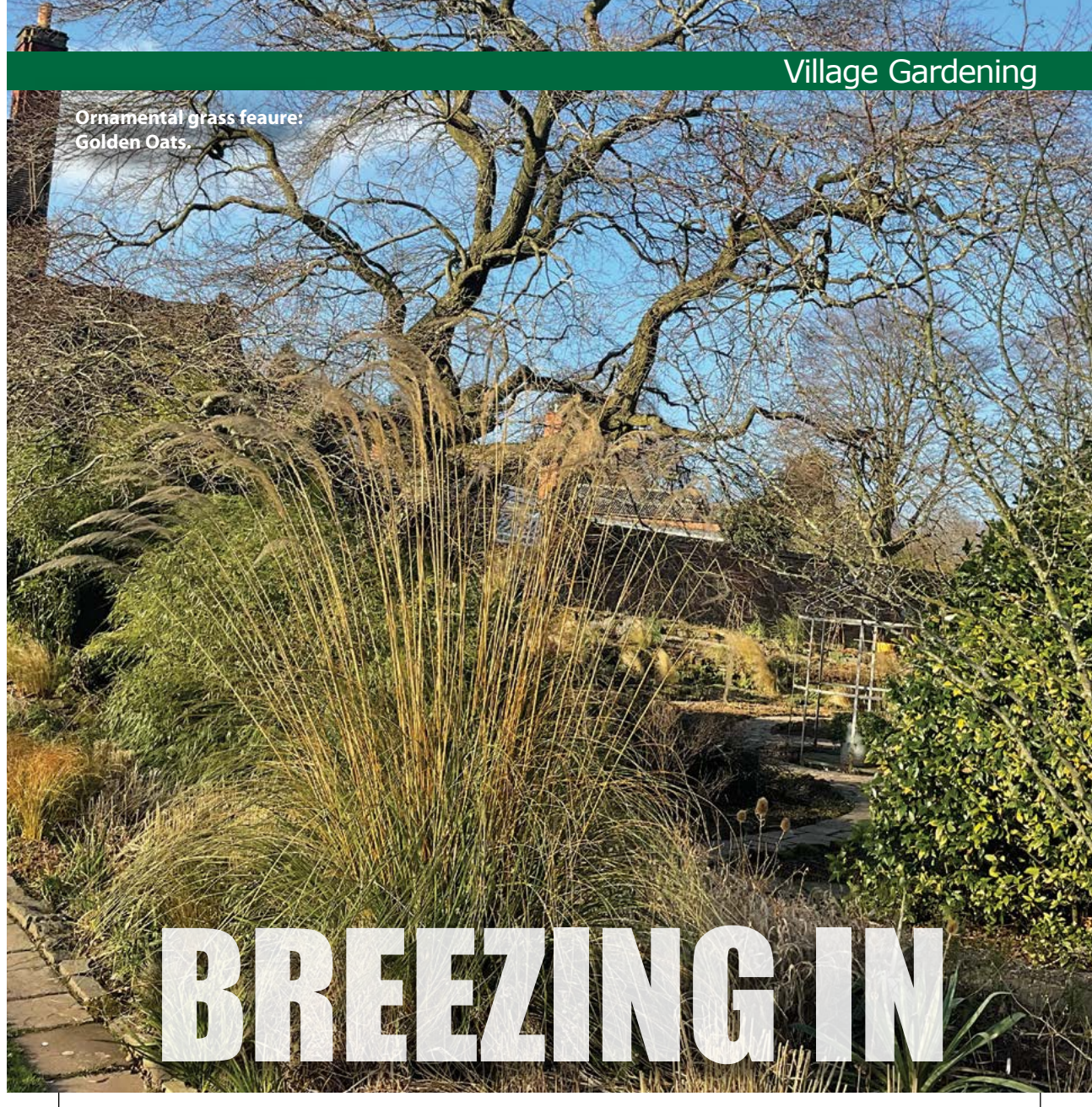

BREEZING IN

March, the month for leaping hares (if you are lucky enough to see them) and strong winds; plus the whole gamut of elements thrown in! It has one foot in two seasons and although March 1st is the meteorological start of spring, I've always felt that the Vernal Equinox on the 21st is when you can feel the garden start revving into action.

The strengthening sun and bright skies intensify the colours of early spring flowers. Yellow narcissus and forsythia with light blue *pulmonaria* and scilla give way to the bright red of *chaenomeles* and brazen orange of Crown Fritillaries. Delicate white of early cherry blossom with an understorey of mauve crocus and anemone *blanda*.

Garden designer **Lindsay Stanton** offers advice on ways to steal a march on spring.

Breezes – and gales – waft the glorious scent of Daphne *bholua* "Jacqueline Postill" which I love, as do the bees. *Pieris japonica* is planning to show off its blush-coloured new growth and fragrant flowers.

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Village Gardening

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The promise of longer days and extra warmth triggers a propagation extravaganza and the urge to go out and garden proves too strong to resist!

Outside interests

March is an exceptionally busy horticultural month and the workload can seem overwhelming, so pace yourself.

The weather may be mercurial and the chances for outside gardening sporadic, but in the warm cocoon of the greenhouse, seed sowing can go into overdrive.

- Half hardy annuals, herbs and a range of vegetable and salad seeds can be sown now, or order young plants to arrive in May.
- Remember to sow an extra packet or two of pollinator-friendly seeds such as corn poppy (*papaver rhoeas*), cornflower (*centaurea cyanus*) and pot marigold (*calendula officinalis*).
- Overwintered dahlias and cannas can be started back into life now.
- Pruning – one of my favourite tasks! Complete rose pruning then feed and mulch well. Late summer flowering shrubs that bear their flowers on this season's growth – buddleja, spiraea, caryopteris, lavatera and hardy fuchsias – will benefit from a cut back. Go easy with lavenders though. Cornus, salix and elder (*sambucus*) plus autumn fruiting raspberries can all be tackled.
- Tall ornamental grasses such as Miscanthus varieties should be taken down to around 15-20cm depending on the plant's maturity before new growth starts. But with Pampas (*cortaderia selloana*) and Golden Oats (*stipa gigantea*) don thick gloves and arm protection before removing their spent plumes and flower spikes right down. Then rake out the old "thatch" leaving elegant domes of foliage.
- Time now to spring clean herbaceous borders by trimming last year's growth from perennials. Lift and split large clumps of Michaelmas daisies, phlox and rudbeckia replanting only the young outer growth.
- Dead head daffodils, split and replant clumps of snowdrops (*galanthus nivalis*) – you'll be glad to see them next winter!

Above: Dramatic topiary and (opposite page) birch trees .

- Review which plants did not do well last year and consider more resilient substitutes. I'm sure there will be much written on "future proofing" our gardens against climate change.

Then stand back and admire your work!

Good bone structure

March presents a last opportunity to appraise the "bone structure" of your garden before all is overwhelmed by the exuberance of new foliage. You can see if changes need to be made.

Maybe part of your space needs repurposing, or if a fresh look at the whole garden is the answer then you could call on the services of a professional designer.

A few adjustments to your planting can also make a difference. The most flower-filled gardens will benefit from a few visual focal points to lead the eye around the plot or to bring it to a halt. They can also add an element of formality to an otherwise "soft" scene.

This is where evergreens come into their own. Topiary box (*buxus*) spheres or naturally round shrubs like hebe "Red Edge" make good 'full stops'. Clipped holly (*ilex* species) and bay (*Laurus nobilis*) grown as standard specimens are amongst some of the plants available to provide statement points.

Essential verticals give emphasis. Trees, with their many attributes (eg bark and leaf colour) such as birch (*betula* species) ornamental cherries (*prunus serrula*), and many japanese maples – *acer palmatum* "Sango kaku" and the lovely a.p. "Bi- hoo" are ideal.

In the borders, simply adding taller grasses, such as miscanthus varieties, herb fennel (*foenilculum vulgare*) or *verbena bonariensis*, will work well.

Finally, every garden should contain water. Just a small ceramic bowl, birdbath or a wildlife pond will provide life-giving hydration to all manner of creatures.

Looking for inspiration

When needing some garden ideas where better to look than at other people's. So visit some of the excellent public gardens we are lucky to have nearby.

The Birmingham Botanical Gardens and Winterbourne House and Gardens in Edgbaston are excellent sources of inspiration.

In the opposite direction lie Hanbury Hall and the glorious Spetchley Park Gardens which re-opens for the year on 22 March.

All will have undergone their winter overhaul so their bone structures will be clearly visible!

Last spring I was asked to revamp an overgrown unusable section of a garden into an alfresco family space in this potential sun trap – my design is above.

We created a level terrace large enough for outdoor furniture, BBQ and umbrella, a small water feature and a shaded spot under the venerable wisteria. Then we filled the narrow borders with scented shrubs and climbing roses, grasses and insect-attracting perennials (see below). All combined to create interest mainly for summer months but also holding something for every season.

WHAT'S ON GUIDE

PARTY TIME WITH DIRTY BRASS

ALVECHURCH-based band Dirty Brass will be performing on Saturday 11 March at Rocklands Club, Birchfield Road, Headless Cross, Redditch, from 7.30pm. Tickets £5 on the door.
The band plays a rangs of songs that will get you moving – or singing – from James Brown to the Jacksons.

EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA at St Laurence Church, Alvechurch B48 7SB invite you to their 14th YOUNG MUSICIANS' SHOWCASE on 18 March at 3pm. Support local young talented musicians up to 18 years. All are welcome, and entry is free.
On 25 March at 7.30 they will hold 'SUNRISE, SUNSET' a programme celebrating night & day including Mozart's 'Eine Kleine Nachtmusik' & 'Sunrise, Sunset' from Fiddler on the Roof. Tickets can be bought in advance for £13, students & children for £3 from www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk, or from Gin & Pickles or The Lounge Alvechurch. Or you can buy on the door £14 & £3
On 20 May, experience 'An Evening of Jazz' with Sauce City Jazz, a relaxed informal evening in the Ark, tickets £10. For more information visit www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk

BEOLEY VILLAGE HALL hosts live music, comedy and jazz nights. The next event will be "Black Country Comedy & Music with Doug Parker" on Saturday 25 March. For Friday night events, the bar opens at 7pm with entertainment from 7.30pm, and on Saturdays the bar opens at 7.15pm with entertainment from 8pm.
Jazz nights occur on the 4th Wednesday of the month, upcoming events include "The Lonnie Donegan Story with Warren James, Alex Clarke, Jim Swinnerton and 'Baby Jools'" on 22 March. On Wednesday Jazz nights the bar opens at 7.45pm, with entertainment from 8.15pm.

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA, conducted by Lee Armstrong, will give their Spring Concert on Sunday 2 April at 7.30pm in St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green, B45 8NR. The interesting programme includes: Haydn – Symphony No.44 in E minor 'Mournful', R. Strauss – Horn Concerto No.2 with Soloist Claire Burnell and Weill arr. Armstrong – Postcards from Berlin (after The Threepenny Opera). Go along to support and bring your friends. Admission is free; donations to the retiring collection are much appreciated.

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY perform Brahms "Requiem" at 3pm on Saturday 25 March at North Bromsgrove High School, see p.44 for more details.

A WONDERFUL NIGHT OF MUSIC, featuring vocalists Mitch Miller and Chloe Barry, will be held on 4 March at Alvechurch Village Hall at 8pm. Tickets cost £12 (plus booking fee) and can be bought from www.eventbrite.co.uk, search "A-wonderful night of music".

MUSIC

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30 with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not.
For more information or to join or book, see their website: www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk. They will be at The Crown, Withybed Green, on 13 March.

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA
Save the date of their Summer concert which will be on Sunday 25 June.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, are back to rehearsals at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings. They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical music along with much more. Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk. They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is a group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. Face to face groups have now resumed, meeting on Wednesdays 2-3pm at Longbridge Retirement Village and Thursdays 2-3pm at St Chad's Church, Rubery (£3 per session). Everyone is welcome!

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs weekly sessions for young brass, wind, and string instrument players to enjoy being part of a group who rehearse and perform together. New members always welcome! Sessions are run by Severn Arts at St John's Middle School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm. Individual instrumental and vocal lessons are also provided at the centre. For more info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available. More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7 pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or email r.g.henley@btinternet.com

DANCING

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Covid-dependent, so please check first by emailing alvechurch-frenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry.
They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day.
No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group! Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Extra safety measures are in place. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS warmly invite everyone to the Friends Meeting House in Sandhills Road. Parking is available on site, and there is access for the disabled. We hope that this winter, rather than remaining isolated at home, you will visit us to meet old and new friends for a chat and a (free!) cup of tea or coffee. It does us all good just to get out of our homes for a short time now and then. COVID has meant that creating friendships and making social contacts has become more important to all of us, and the Meeting House is a pleasant, quiet and comfortable place where you can meet other people.
A series of film showings will be held at the Friends Meeting House this year, the next of which will be held on 17 March at 7pm, a Disney musical where famous magical nanny, played by Julie Andrews comes to rescue the Banks' family with magical adventures. Won 5 Oscar Awards. Another 17 wins & 17 nominations. Digitally remastered.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. You can now find one of these hubs in Alvechurch. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, however you may find these in many different places such as community centres or libraries, and all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood.
Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. More info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact: Charles Deverill on cdjd26@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall. Entry is £1 for members and £2 for guests, including a drink and biscuit. The Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 22 March at 7.30pm. The AGM is open to all, and AVS members are encouraged to attend.
On Sunday 16 April AVS will be holding a litter picklng family session at 10am, meet in The Square, outside The Lounge. On Wednesday 19 April at 7.30pm Robin May will be giving a talk: "Fascinating Futures: (Mis) Adventures with Microbes and Food". For more and full details, visit www.alvechurchvs.org or contact Chairperson Chris Miall via R.C.Miall@bham.ac.uk
AVS is always pleased to welcome new members—contact Martin on 07742 100007 or martinclarke1@btinternet.com

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves.
They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be very pleased to see you.

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THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for details: www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers supporting local refugees who arrived under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). New volunteers always needed – training and support given. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious belief. Full details at www.brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Sheila (0121 445 2813) or Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Barn at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, but you must book in advance via www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk, which also contains full details of events.

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community. If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk or on Facebook @ContacttheElderlyRedditch

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects. The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. New members welcome. For more info visit www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre. If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heart-speakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmasters-heartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

MIDLAND Ancestors have resumed monthly meetings at Bromsgrove Methodist Centre (19 Stratford Road, Bromsgrove, B60 1AS). More info at: www.bromsgrovebmsgh.co.uk

LICKEY Valley Trefoil Guild, as a branch of the Guide Association, is open to anyone over the age of 18. Make new friends, travel, explore, serve the community and help Guiding and Scouting in your area. The Guild meets at Barnt Green Scout & Guide Centre (off Blackwell Road, Barnt Green, B45 8BT) every second Weds from 2-4pm. For more info call 0121 445 3907 or 0121 445 2813 or visit www.trefoilguild.co.uk

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 3rd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Friends Meeting House, Barnt Green. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month. There is usually a guest speaker. They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity. Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or look on Facebook @wbdcs.org.uk. Please email contact@wbdcs.org.uk for further information. Meetings start at 7.45pm. Non-members are always welcome. Free entry.

ALVECHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB usually meets on the second Weds each month at Alvechurch Cricket Club at 1.30pm, and offers the chance to make new friends, meet old ones and enjoy talks, demos and visits. The next talk will be "Egypt" by John Butterworth. Info from Janet on 0121 447 7870 or Lis on 0121 445 3895.

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12noon at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides regular opportunities for retired professionals and businessmen to meet socially and share common interests. A members' meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Weds each month, 10am–12noon, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker. For more info visit www.bromsgroveprobus.co.uk or contact Jim on 01527 833531 bromsgrove1982probus.weebley.com

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment. They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker. Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. For more information please email: info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit the website: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955. New members welcome.

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and the odd reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

BIODIVERSITY WALKS

MARY Green's next walk to look at biodiverse habitat round Alvechurch is on Wednesday 15 March, repeated on Saturday 18 March.

Meet on either day at 10.30am at The Crown, Withybed Green. The walk takes about two hours and is gentle and slow.

For more information contact alvbiodiv@gmail.com

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather conditions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com

The next walk will be on 5 March for "A walk around Beoley", led by Sue and Roger Wardle. Meet at St Leonard's Church, Church Hill, Redditch, B98 9AR, call 07838737234 for more information.

The group will meet again for "A Spring walk in Alvechurch" with Mary Green on 2 April at 2pm. Meet at The Crown, Withybed Lane, B48 7PN.

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties - contact: bgfcmembership@outlook.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

RELAXATION & MEDITATION for Everyone. Short, welcoming & inclusive classes with an experienced teacher at The Ark, Alvechurch, and online. An experiential approach to relaxation and meditation for a calm, clear mind and relaxed, balanced outlook. For more information, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085.

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailingbarntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm @Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week

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blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue— classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or Facebook @ Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year. More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Where it exists, walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment.
Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church.
Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park.
Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm, meet at The Oakalls Play Area.
Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins).
Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension. These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established.
Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground.
Wythall Health Walk, Wednesday, 2pm, meet at Wythall car park B47 6LZ.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY

BARNT Green Choral Society begins its concert programme for 2023 at 3pm on Saturday 25 March at North Bromsgrove High School with a performance of Brahms' *Requiem*.

The Soloists are Dave Coulson (baritone, pictured above left) and Marianne Ayling (soprano, pictured below left), accompanied by Alastair Moseley and Andrew Burling, who play Brahms' own arrangement for piano duet accompaniment of this famous work.

Tickets cost £10 each (under 16s are free) and are available from any member of the society or on the door on the day of the concert. Entrance to the concert is via the doors at the rear of the school and there is plenty of free car parking.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

PILATES Mat classes and 1:1 (apparatus). Irrespective of age, lifestyle, health and ability, we could all benefit from listening to our bodies: tuning in to our needs, building connections throughout the body, focusing on detail; challenging what is strong, building what is weaker, balancing the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Book a 1:1 apparatus session (Barnt Green) or a mat class (Rowney Green). Call 07759 590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

COMMUNITY Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Baptist Church, run by Bromsgrove council: Active Seniors on Tues 9.30–10.30am. and Zumba Gold on Thurs 1–2pm (each £3.50 per session). Fully-qualified, insured instructors on hand to help. For more info, call 01527 881289 or visit at www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/things-to-do/active-bromsgrove

YOGA for Every-Body. Friendly & Inclusive classes in Blackwell, Alvechurch and online with an experienced teacher. A slow but powerful approach to yoga, which encourages free, natural alignment of the body, whilst building strength, flexibility and relaxed awareness. Contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903663085.

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) is now based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescyclingclub.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm. Call Nikki for more information: 0778814817

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING runs classes at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays from 19th January, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. For info: http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 8 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

EVERY SCOUT GROUP in Bromsgrove (which includes Barnt Green, Blackwell, Catshill, Finstall and Lickey as well as the town centre) currently has girls and boys aged 6-18 waiting to join, their numbers restricted by the ratio of adults to young people. A few more adults helping would enable existing leaders to open more Beaver, Cub, Scout and Explorer units allowing more young people to experience Scouting and learn skills for life. If you could spare a few hours each month please contact us on 07539 031740 or visit scoutshw.org.uk

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs ever-popular antenatal and postnatal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Courses are held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. Visit www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

ROWNEY GREEN PRE-SCHOOL offers learning through play for children from two years to school age, Tues–Thurs 9am–2pm, term-time only. Call 07522 926286 or see Facebook.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesday's. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

FINSTALL Pre-school in Finstall Village Hall, Mon–Thur 9.15am–1pm (term-time only). Led by a qualified teacher. Visits welcome. Call 07903 560787 or email Finstallpreschool@hotmail.com

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG. Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

GAMES & COMPETITIONS

SHIRLEY & WYTHALL CHESS CLUB meets at Wythall Community Association in Silver Street, Wythall, B47 6LZ, every Thurs from 7.30pm. The club has four teams playing in competitive leagues. Friendly atmosphere. New players are most welcome, just turn up or contact Barry Knee on 01564 826250

SPADESBOURNE Bridge Club plays at Amphlett Hall, Crown Close, Bromsgrove B61 8DW. Join the group for friendly bridge in a pleasant venue on Thurs evenings, 7pm for a 7.15 start. Table money for visitors is £3. Details from Jan on 01905 772256.

MONDAY Bridge Club at Barnt Green Friends Meeting House would like to welcome a few new members – for more info contact the organiser, Des Clarke, on 0121 453 3034.

FRIDAY Bridge Club meets at Burcot Village Hall every Friday evening. We play friendly, competitive Bridge in comfortable surrounds. We meet at 18:45 for a prompt start at 19:00. Refreshments are provided free of charge. For full details please contact the Secretary Ed Payne on 07950951122 or visit www.bridgewebs.com/friday

BROMSGROVE Bridge Club plays every Tuesday evening from 7.25 to 10.30pm at The Court Leet (a Hungry Horse Pub) 174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove, B61 7AY.
We are very friendly and welcome guests or potential new members, with or without a partner. The club is affiliated to the English Bridge Union and the Worcestershire Contract Bridge Association. Contact the Secretary, Sally Flood, on 01527 832468 or sallyflood@gmail.com

BROMSGROVE Board Gamers is a friendly group which meets at 7.30pm each Weds at the Ladybird Inn, Aston Fields. More info on Facebook 'Bromsgrove Board Gamers'.

BARNT Green Duplicate Bridge Club meets at St Andrew's Church Hall each Weds afternoon and would like new members – contact Liz on 07538 092296.

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so. They like to read to local audiences and some of them write "poetry on request." Their next meeting is 1 March. For more information, contact mail@marygreen.plus.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

COMMON THREAD: Bring your knitting, crochet, patchwork, sewing etc. All are welcome. Friendly help and chat. Meets on the last Saturday of each month (apart from Christmas Day, of course!) in The Wheel at St. Catherine's, Blackwell B60 1BN. Please bring your own drink to stay covid safe. Further information from Angela Bevan 0121 477 9924.

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or

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share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroft-arts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the last Tues of the month from 2pm–3.30pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide HQ in Blackwell Road, Barnt Green. Tuesday morning and Tuesday afternoon sessions. Workshops with visiting tutors during each term. There is a waiting list, but enquiries from improvers and intermediate artists welcomed. Jackie: 0121 445 4745.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY meet at The Village Hall on the second Thursday each month at 7.15pm.
On Thursday 9 March they will welcome Mick Poultry and his topic is "A year on the Plot". Mick is from the Black County in the West Midlands and is an award winning vegetable grower, a lecturer, a garden demonstrator and judge at many Flower shows.
Mick has perfected a natural, cost-effective and highly efficient compost, which is ready to use in just a month and he is generally known as "The Compost King". Guests are welcome at £3.50 including coffee and biscuits. For more information please contact Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874.

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

ROWNEY GREEN FLOWER CLUB, held at the Hall: You don't have to be a flower arranger to enjoy the friendly company of our members, while watching beautiful flowers being transformed into an amazing arrangement. For more info contact Felicity on 07812 336263

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 0121 445 1915.

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com.
You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

HELP & ADVICE

POPPIES' is a monthly bereavement support group — contact Rev Sheri Gidney on 0121 445 1185 for details.

DIVORCED/separated and having trouble seeing your children? Being excluded from their lives? The ASSOCIATION FOR SHARED PARENTING has been helping mums and dads in the family court system and problems over contact and residence for over 20 years. Visit www.associationforsharedparenting.org.uk

REPAIR CAFE is for those looking to save their money and fix broken or faulty household items. The Repair Cafe is part of an international network that keeps faulty appliances and clothes out of landfill and offers 'a cuppa' and a slice of cake to visitors while they wait. Visit the Repair Shop on the first Saturday of every month 2-5pm at All Saints Hall, Burcot Lane, B60 1AD. For more info: 07804251731 or repaircafebromsgrove@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY hosts one-to-one Computer Sessions for people wanting to learn the basics. If you need help with emails or advice on surfing online then pop in to arrange for free tuition, provided by volunteers. They can also help with online applications for Blue Badges and bus passes. For more info call The Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

GUIDE DOGS are looking for volunteers who could give a few hours of their time to help someone locally and living with sight loss, get out and about. Volunteer sighted guides support the person they are partnered with to feel part of the community.
No previous experience is necessary and full training will be provided and the role is extremely flexible! More information email MidlandsMSG@guidedogs.org.uk or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcross-wi.wordpress.com or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7.00pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7.30pm on the second Tues every month at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB).
More information from Helen Spence on 01527 822611 or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.

BROMSGROVE BELLES WI meets on the second Monday each month at the Meeting Room at St Godwald's Church at 7.30pm. For more info, contact President Helen Holbeche at helenholbeche@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Mariea Clarke clarke.mariea@gmail.com or alvechurchpres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

FINSTALL & COFTON HACKETT WI meets on the first Monday of the month at Finstall Village Hall at 2pm. For more info call President Val Wheeler on 01527 874518.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 4th Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susan-barratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, Whetty Lane, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Anyone can just drop in on either night. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

VILLAGE VENUES FOR HIRE

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY HALL for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

THE WHEEL COMMUNITY ROOM IN BLACKWELL has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

THE TRINITY CENTRE IN LICKEY has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN PARISH CENTRE has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week. Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

THE ARK AT ST LAURENCE has a large hall and kitchen, and smaller upper room for hire, for one-off and regular hires. More information and bookings please contact Lynda on 0121 447 7955 or email admin@thearkalvechurch.co.uk

ALVECHURCH Cricket Club Pavilion is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

THE DEADLINE FOR WHAT'S ON SUBMISSIONS FOR THE APRIL ISSUE OF *THE VILLAGE* IS 6 MARCH.

'Church climbing back

Alvechurch FC's crawl out of the relegation zone continued during February with two wins, two losses and two draws as the side battled through their full schedule.

This packed timetable caused by The Church's deep cup runs continues throughout March, with four more mid-week matches on top of matches every Saturday.

As *The Village* went to press, they were six places above the foot of the Non-League Premier Southern Central league table.

And the side are now without their captain, Jamie Willets, who left the club for league leaders Tamworth after seven years at Lye Meadow.

Jamie had become a club legend with his leadership both on and off the pitch and his never say die attitude throughout his 210 games for the club.

Since joining Alvechurch FC he led the club to back-to-back league promotions, league cup and Worcestershire Senior Cup success and saw the club reach the second round of the FA Cup.

Jamie was always prepared to represent the club at schools and training the youth teams and will be a big loss to the club.

Jamie Willets during Alvechurch FC's victory at Cheltenham.
Picture/Ian Macvie

Meanwhile, manager Ian Long has been busy in the transfer market bringing in five new faces either on loan or permanently over the past month.

Centre forward Jamie Soule has joined Alvechurch from National League South side Dover Athletic. Jamie started his career at West Bromwich Albion youth team before progressing through the under 18s and 21s. Jamie also has league experience with loans at Barrow, Lincoln City and Cheltenham.

Goalkeeper Harvey Randle has also signed permanently, joinging the hybrid programme having played for Derby County under 18s.

Three players have joined the club on loan: centre forward Ben Beresford and central midfielder Remi Walker from Birmingham City, and centre back Abel Alabi from Coventry City under-21s.

AFC FIXTURES

League matches unless stated.

MARCH

4th Kings Langley (h) 3.00
6th Stourbridge (a) 7.45
11th Royston Town (a) 3.00
14th Coalville Town (h) 7.45
18th Stratford Town (a) 3.00
21st Barwell (h) 7.45
25th Bedford Town (h) 3.00
28th Royston Town (h) 7.45

APRIL

1st Ilkeston Town (h) 3.00
8th Needham Market (h) 3.00
10th Redditch United (a) 3.00
15th Hitchin Town (h) 3.00
22nd Rushall Olympic (a) 3.00

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